

Think I Know Where You Belong by ConvenientAlias

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Summary:

Max can't help but think that El belongs with her.
Unfortunately El is already dating someone else.

Think I Know Where You Belong

Max figured at first that El, going to school with them, would adjust much the same way she had. And in some ways she really was similar. She had the same tough attitude that made people not want to mess with her. She hung out with the same crowd—well, with Max and Lucas and Mike and Will and Dustin, which was hardly a crowd given its size—and she tried her best to fit in. In other ways, though? Quite different.

For one thing, the rumors about her were wilder. People said Max was a jerk but they said El was a straight up witch. The rumors were also truer. Max might kick someone in the shins for talking shit but she wouldn't break their nose. El, if you talked about her to her face or you messed around with one of the boys, would wreak utter havoc. And no one ever caught her.

She only began to settle down after a year or two. Then the rumors began to settle too, and meetings with the guild became a bit less intense. That was about when she started actually talking to Max, too, instead of acting so skittish around her and occasionally glaring.

This was when both of them went into high school. It was also about when Max realized that she was very gay and very unfortunately into El Hopper.

"I think we should see other people," she told Lucas that year. They'd been together for so long now that it was a breakup waiting to happen, really—they were teenagers now but they rarely kissed and the platonic-ness of their relationship was starting to make things awkward.

He seemed relieved. "Yeah, maybe." With a nervous smile he kissed her on the lips one last time. "We were good though, right?"

"Yeah," she said. She smiled too. "I'm glad you were my first."

And they laughed awkwardly and hugged and stayed the best of friends. Later, Max told Lucas her reasons, other than that they had lost the spark. That she thought she might like girls more than boys

lately. One girl in particular. He was someone she knew wouldn't judge her, and he didn't.

"El's a tough case," he said.

"I know. It's hard to tell what she's thinking."

"No, I mean. She's been dating Mike since...like...forever."

This was also unfortunately true. Eleven and Mike had been going out for so long that they were practically married. And while lately a few cracks had begun to show in their relationship, they always mended after their fights, made things right again. It was like watching a romcom. It was, in Max's humble opinion, disgusting.

Though she wasn't exactly unbiased.

Max did have one advantage over Mike, which was that she was getting closer to El lately. Closer and closer.

El asked her over sometimes now. Apparently she had begun to enjoy having girls over sometimes, but she said that most of the girls at school didn't totally get her because they hadn't been through what their group had. And because they liked to talk behind her back.

"I'm pretty sure that's just because they're jealous," Max said.

El made a confused face. "Jealous?"

"Because you're, you know...pretty badass." Max shrugged.

El laughed and tilted her head. "Bitchin'." There was a fond spark in her eyes, but it was distant, not directed towards Max. It was a word El used sometimes. She always sounded like she was quoting someone.

"Well, you have a boyfriend already and we're just freshmen. And you're really pretty." True, her fashion boomeranged back and forth between overalls, leather jackets and pink skirts, but on her most

feminine days, it was no wonder the popular kids felt threatened. Especially when she already was dating Mike Wheeler, who had turned out surprisingly hot according to the consensus of most of the school's population.

El played with a strand of her curly hair. A smile played on her face as well, only half present. "You think so?"

"Well, obviously." Max rolled her eyes.

"Thanks. You're pretty too."

This made Max blush and mutter something unintelligible. Which it shouldn't have—girls were allowed to compliment each other without it getting awkward. Even socially unschooled El knew that, and she gave Max a confused look. Max brushed it off and changed the subject.

Later, after she was supposed to be long gone, she hung out in the trees outside El's house and watched through the window as El argued with someone on the phone, probably Mike. She hated being at home. It...was not a good place, though with Billy moved out lately it was at least a bit quieter.

She often spent her nights wandering around town or standing outside friends' houses like this. Maybe that made her a stalker, like she had once accused Lucas of being. She knew it made her something weird at least. Different. But then, she had always felt different. Her tomboy plaids and sneakers were beginning to get old at school; girls looked at her even more strangely than they used to. She wished she could have been pretty and normal like Nancy Wheeler (before she went off to college) or even El. El, the freak who somehow achieved normal nonetheless.

Not much noise filtered all the way down here from upstairs, but enough to tell that El was angry. Max sighed. Seemed that lately everyone had a reason to be angry. She felt angry a lot of the time too. It wasn't something she talked to El about.

Well. A typical Tuesday night. She would walk home and spend the rest of the evening listening to music as quietly as possible.

“Mike wants to go hiking this weekend,” El said.

It was Friday and school had just let out. They were sitting on a park bench, waiting for Chief Hopper to pick El up. Max, on the other hand, would walk home alone. Or, more likely, catch the ride back to the Hopper place and spend a few hours there.

“I hadn’t heard about that,” Max said. To be fair, she’d been less included in group activities lately. Ever since she broke up with Lucas, Mike and Dustin had started acting protective of Lucas around her, despite her and Lucas still getting along perfectly fine. And they’d started treating her more like a girl, and thus an outsider.

“No, not the group. Just me and him. And I guess Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler would be taking us.”

“So? You gonna go?”

El shrugged.

She was in hillbilly mode today. Huge bulky jacket, jeans and a turtleneck. She matched Max that way, and looked the way she used to when they first met.

Max liked her that way a lot. Not least because she’d noticed Mike got excited when El wore makeup and girly clothes. It felt like the two of them together were rebelling against the system, and even against the idea that either of them might need boys. Of course that couldn’t be the way El meant it.

“I kind of want to do homework,” El said at last.

It wasn’t a good reason to back out on something—homework could always be done later. But Max would certainly encourage it. “Gotta get those good grades,” she said with a hesitant smile.

“Do you want to work on it together?” El asked.

“Sure. You know me, I always like hanging out.”

And El smiled. She almost looked relieved. Regardless, she had a gorgeous smile when it was real and wide—bright enough to light up all of Hawkins, Max thought for a moment.

Impulsively, she grabbed El's hand and squeezed it. "It'll be fun!"

There were bad times sometimes, too. Bad nights in particular.

Once or twice when the screaming got too loud Max called El on the walkie talkie, on the frequency the two of them used, just the two of them, not the boys. She told her she was climbing out her back window and El could expect her over in ten, maybe twenty minutes. Left pillows in her bed because by now she knew how to hide her own absence.

Sometimes on nights like those El would start walking and meet her halfway. Always she would at least be waiting up in her own bedroom.

"I want to learn how to drive," she said. "Then I can pick you up."

Max would always snort and say it wouldn't happen again, but secretly she thought that would be pretty nice.

She wasn't happy when El and Mike broke up.

Well, not happy so to speak. That would have been mean, harsh and unfeeling. No, she couldn't gloat over two of her best friends ending a relationship, especially when both of them looked just so sad about it.

She did feel a slightly smug feeling despite her better half, but when El talked to her about it, she felt bad. Especially when El started crying.

"I just think he's going to hate me now."

“No, he won’t hate you! I mean look at Lucas—he doesn’t hate me!” Granted, that had been an abnormally amicable breakup and Mike was not usually as forgiving as Lucas, but it meant something, right? And Mike and Lucas were friends, and Mike and El had known each other since forever, and there was no way he could hate her, not when he loved her so much.

“He was my best friend,” El sobbed.

Max held her and stroked her hair and handed her Kleenex. Hopper brought her Eggos, which she rejected and then ate and then cried over.

It turned out all right, though. For a while things were really awkward in the friend group. Then the whole group apparently decided to accept both El and Max back at the same time. Now, after the interim of awkwardness, they were somewhat paired off with each other. On the other side of the equation, Mike resorted to hanging out more with Will, and Lucas seemed to be interested in a new girl, though no one could convince him to say who it was. A mystery.

Things stabilized. Then the winter dance drifted around again, causing the same upset that it always did. One might almost call it chaos.

Lucas and Dustin were having crises over who to ask out. Dustin was frustrated because Steve wasn’t in town to give hair advice. Mike seemed to be in a depressive funk and angrily told anyone who asked him about it that he didn’t believe in love and dances were dumb. Will was nervous and apparently torn between going and staying behind to keep Mike company.

“You going?” Max asked El.

“I think so. Would it be bad? Since Mike’s not...”

Max squeezed El’s hand. “I think it’s fine.”

El smiled. “Then I’ll go.”

She always looked gorgeous on the dance floor. A blue dress, this

time, with hints of white and silver. She had mostly slicked her hair back and she was wearing just a little makeup. Max knew she couldn't compete with that, especially since her own dress this year was bright pink and clashed horribly with her hair. Nonetheless, when the music for a slow dance started she tugged her out onto the dance floor and put a hand on her waist.

"Two girls aren't supposed to dance together," El said, a small frown.

"Yeah. But...I wanted to." Max pulled her closer, then hesitated. "Is that okay?"

"I like dancing with you."

Later, she would ask El if she knew what Max meant by it all. Although words didn't seem to encompass the feeling one had while dancing, sometimes words were needed. She needed to know if she'd gotten this right.

But for now, dancing with El in a swirling sea of skirts and discount suits, she couldn't help but feel like she had been standing at the back door waiting for her for the longest time, and now had finally been let in.

Author's Note:

This was written for the March Femslash Minis, for the prompt of "eleven/max + song lyrics." This is more of a...music video fic, and I know it's way too late to be writing Taylor Swift AUs BUT for some reason it was the first song I thought of so I hope it's okay.

Also I swear I don't hate Mike, and I actually kind of love Lucas, so sorry for breaking these couples up. The Mike drama was necessary to fit the song.

Comments and kudos welcome! Or come talk to me on tumblr at [convenientalias](#).